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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF  
PROPHETIC INSPIRATION

A dissertation  
submitted to the B. D. Committee of the  
Senate of the University of Alberta  
in candidacy for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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## INTRODUCTION



## INTRODUCTION

Christianity is frankly and unashamedly a Bible Religion. The beliefs of the Christian about God, the destiny of man, the means of salvation and the purpose of life are based upon the written word of his religion. It is, then, of great importance that the Christian should understand his Bible and should be able to extract from it a sane and reasoned meaning.

Not everything in the Bible is relevant to Christianity, nor are many attitudes contained therein healthy for the modern Christian to adopt. Much of the Bible may be set aside as an inadequate human attempt to understand the divine mind and thus unnecessary for human consumption. Most of the Bible is eternal and fraught with meaning for any age or generation. In order to know what is relevant and what is irrelevant the Christian must set up for himself a standard of criticism and a basis of judgment. This can be done only as the individual thoroughly understands and appreciates the various parts of the Bible interpreted according to a modern approach based on a sane literary and historical criticism.

Perhaps the most sinned against sections of the scriptures are those in the Old Testament that have to do



with prophets and prophecy. Papias wrote of the Gospel of Matthew, "So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew Language and everyone interpreted them as he was able," (H.E. 3:39), and so attempted to explain the wide variety of interpretations prevalent in his day. The statement is indeed true when applied to the various interpretations of the prophets and prophecy that are current today. It seems that "everyone interprets as he is able", but it is very regrettable that the most vociferous interpreters are not able to read the oracles in the Hebrew Language. The result is that many unreasonable, unscientific, uncritical and unscrupulous theories regarding prophets and prophecy gain the ear of the public and all is confusion.

There is a crying need for a scientific, rational and critical view of Old Testament Prophets and Prophecy. This need may be met in a variety of ways. One tool which may be used to do this is modern psychology wherein a conception of prophecy is moulded according to generally accepted psychological principles. The prophet was primarily a human being, and as such his mind and personality were subjected to the same influences that guide the workings and the lapses of the ordinary man's mind. The conclusion is that if psychological truths are applied to the recorded facts of prophetic action and speech, the result





should be some rational explanation of this Old Testament phenomenon. It is the purpose of this essay to attempt an understanding of Old Testament Prophets and Prophecy in the light of modern psychological knowledge.

The first essential in such a study is to free one's mind of any preconceived notion as to what the prophets were and as to what prophecy was. From there the subject is approached through an honest view of the Bible rooted in the established facts of historical and literary criticism. Any doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scripture or the infallibility of the Bible has no place in a rational and scientific study.

It must be remembered that the writings of the Bible were for a certain period and for a definite group of people. The prophets spoke to specific situations in definite generations. They did not necessarily speak to generations yet unborn. In Ezekiel (Chap. 23) there is a prediction relating to the vast armies that were to be arrayed against Israel under the command of Gog and Magog. It is very clear (vs. 8) that the prophet expects this to happen "after many days", which means "very shortly" and not some twenty-odd centuries afterwards. The purpose of the prophecy was to prove to the people of that day the power





of Yahweh and not to demonstrate his power to modern nations. Again the destruction of Tyre is foretold (Ezekiel 26 to 28) and the return of the remnant of Israel is predicted (Isaiah 40-55). The unprejudiced reader will easily discern that these events were regarded as imminent and not as happenings centuries distant. Thus the whole range of Hebrew Prophecy, with one or two possible exceptions, has to do with the events of the day in which the prophecies were uttered. It is a violation of literary criticism to attempt to make them refer to times that have not yet come into human history.

Another point to be noted is that the prophets were not infallible. All their prophecies were not fulfilled. Jeremiah (Jer. 36:30) uttered a curse on Jehoiakin and asserted that he would die a violent death and that his body would not have a decent burial. The historical Book of Kings (II Kings 24:6) indicates that Jehoiakin "slept with his fathers" which is the Hebrew formula for a peaceful demise and a respectable burial. Even the prophets themselves lived to see their prophecies fail as when Ezekiel realized that his prediction concerning the destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadrezzar was in error (Ezekiel 29:17-20). Other examples of the failure of prophets to be entirely accurate could be gleaned from the records. These examples are



sufficient indication that the prophets were not infallible.

The utterances of the prophets were not given in an absolute sense. Many of the predictions were conditional and were not considered to be letter perfect. The most famous of such is the story of the prophet Jonah. He wanted to delay the announcement of the destruction of Ninevah because he felt that too many of the inhabitants would escape their punishment if they had a period of forty days in which to repent. What Jonah feared actually did happen and the conditional prophecy served as a warning. Yahweh very definitely instructs Jeremiah (Jer. 18:7-10) about conditional prophecies when he asserts that there is always a chance for repentance. The obvious conclusion is that the prophets spoke with great conviction yet they did not anticipate that every prophecy would be fulfilled to the finest detail.

All prophecies have not the same moral value and so cannot be regarded as equal in the sight of Yahweh. Some of the prophecies are cruel desires for revenge and invoke great disaster upon the enemies of Israel and upon the personal enemies of the prophets (cf. the curses of Jeremiah and Ezekiel). These cannot be compared in moral value to the conception of the Suffering Servant as proclaimed by the





Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55). The cruelties in the time of Elijah when he exterminated the prophets of Baal (I Kings 18) are on a low plane of morality when compared with the prophetic conception of redemptive love as portrayed by Hosea. The student of the prophets must have a fine sense of discrimination and an independent power of judgment before he is able to assert that any given prophecy establishes either a norm for personal morals or a standard for social action. In addition he must possess a spirit of deep understanding and kindly criticism before he is able to assert that certain prophecies apply to the present day or to future times.

Realizing, then, that the Prophets and their Prophecies must be approached in a scientific spirit and with open minds, the student is ready to proceed with a study of Prophetic Inspiration. Much extraneous material must be cleared away and the very heart of the prophetic message must be approached. This will be attempted from a psychological viewpoint. First of all some of the abuses that were present in the personalities of some of the prophets will be discussed. Finally an estimate will be made of the source of inspiration of the greatest of the prophets.



## PROPHECY AND ECSTASY





## Chapter I

### PROPHECY AND ECSTASY

Our word "ecstasy" comes from the Greek word *ἐκστασις*, which, when translated literally, means "to place outside" or "to stand outside". In a religious sense it is used to describe a person whose spirit "stands outside" of his body and allows some other spirit to take possession of the body. Overcome by religious emotion an individual sometimes falls into a trance or a cataleptic fit and thus his spirit has left his body for the time being. (This meaning of ecstasy is illustrated in the New Testament in Acts 10:10; 11:15; 22:17).

Much of the history of emotional religion has been written in terms of ecstasy and trances. The modern man, with his critical faculties awake and with his scientific viewpoint, looks askance at such phenomena and wonders about the ethical value of such a religion and asks whether a religion can remain honest, sincere and ethical when such things are made a part of religion. When a man loses control of his own body does he not lose control of his mental balance too?

Sinclair Lewis in his heart-searching novel "Elmer



Gantry" has exposed such religion as seen by the modern mind. He records the hypocrisy and deceit and immorality that might easily grow up when the emotions are placed above the intellect.

Immediately the question arises as to how much ecstasy there was in Old Testament Prophecy. Was it of the "Elmer Gantry" type? If so has it any appeal to or any message for the modern world?

In the first place let it be said that many of the Early Christian Apologists assumed that there was ecstasy present in Old Testament Prophecy and were not troubled by the fact. Indeed they considered that some manifestation of the ecstatic state was essential in order that the presence of God might be assumed. It is doubtful whether this idea had a really Christian or Hebrew origin. More than likely the notion of the necessity of an ecstatic state came from a non-Christian source and was assimilated into Christian thinking. Thus Plato, writing in *Timaeus* (71), says, "God has given the art of divination not to the wisdom but to the foolishness of man. No man, when in his wits, attains prophetic truth and inspiration; but when he receives the inspired word, either his intelligence is enthralled in sleep, or he is demented by some distemper or possession."



This idea of prophetic inspiration gained currency in Christian Thought for Athenagoras (ca. A.D. 177) wrote about the prophets, "while entrained and deprived of their natural powers of reason by the influence of the Divine Spirit, they uttered that which was wrought in them, the Spirit using them as its instrument as a flute-player might blow a flute", (Apol. IX). Others have spoken of God as being the "plectrum striking a lyre". The early Christian writers assumed that ecstasy was a normal phenomenon and that it was essential to an inspired message. The prophet was merely a medium through which the Spirit of God spoke. The individual had nothing to do with the message for his spirit "stood outside" of his body. A theory of verbal infallibility may easily be constructed from such a premise.

Such a point of view has had its proponents all through the centuries and is quite common today. For some people the mark of a true religious experience is a violent emotional upheaval. It has been and still is the studied purpose of some religionists to induce a state where one spirit "stands outside" of the body and another spirit takes possession. This other spirit is often dignified with the title "Holy Spirit". It is a well established fact that revival services can induce ecstatic states, that these states become infectious and that epidemics of ecstasy have





been known. Outstanding are the records of the dancing epidemics of the Middle Ages in Germany and Italy; the Convulsionnaires of St. Medard in the 18th Century.

In recent times evangelists in the southern States have been boastful of the "manifestations of the presence of the Lord". Whole communities have been infected by such things as "jerks" brought on by the stress of emotional preaching and by the so-called "power of the Holy Spirit. Professor Coe in his "Psychology of Religion" (p. 194) records as follows, "A minister who participated in the great revival in Kentucky in 1801 gives the following classification of cases that fell under his observation:- the falling exercise; the jerks; the dancing exercise; the laughing exercise; the running exercise; and the singing exercise. 'Getting the power' seems to have been a popular designation in some parts of the country for extreme loss of muscular control, manifested by falling and lying prone for a period."

Coe goes on to say that the phenomenon of "speaking with tongues" comes into the class of ecstatic experiences. The ordinary person cannot understand the gibberish uttered on such occasions and so there is the necessity of an interpreter. This fact alone is sufficient proof, to some, that it is the Lord who speaks. The Pentecostal Assembly demands,





as a proof of salvation, that a person should "speak with tongues".

The underlying assumption is that such ecstatic states were indulged in by the Prophets and Early Christians and, hence, there is an established precedent for present day action.

The phenomena of religious experience in the Early Christian Church is outside of the scope of this essay even as are the so-called religious experiences of the present day. What is of interest here is the fact that some modern scholars insist that the type of emotionalism described above was a part of the life of the Prophets of Israel and that their inspiration had its basis in such performances. The general thesis of scholars of this conviction is that the prophets received their messages in varying states of emotion and then proceeded to interpret these messages into the language of the people. Even the great ethical pronouncements of the prophets, such as Isaiah, Amos and Jeremiah, are said to be not without an ecstatic element. H. W. Robinson in, "The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament" writes,

"The prophets who so profoundly transformed the religion of Israel and of the world were assuredly not men of unbalanced mind. But certain features of the prophetic writings do seem to point to an



intensity of psychical experience, and therefore, of temperament, which distinguishes the prophet generally from other men."

A little later he says, "Abnormal psychosis is surely present."

Oesterley and Robinson in their work, "A History of Israel", discuss the ecstatic experiences of the early prophets and then write thus of the canonical prophets,

"To their own generation these men were indistinguishable from the popular Nebi'im, save, perhaps, that each of them stood alone, and that they were not connected with companies into which the professional ecstasies tended to group themselves." (cf. Vol. 1, page 370)

Similar views to these may be found in the works of such a scholar as Prof. J. M. P. Smith in his two books, "The Prophets and their Times", and "The Prophets and their Problems".

The point is immediately conceded that, in the early days of prophecy, the ecstatic state played an important role. The Canaanite Religion was a religion of ecstasy and excess. Even if the Children of Israel were innocent of such things before the occupation of Canaan they most certainly adopted them in the syncretism of religions and culture during the occupation. The list of ecstatic manifestations given by Dr. Joe and noted above were quite common in those early days. Bands of wild-eyed dervishes





gathered together and toured the countryside using all manner of means to bring on emotional debauches. Epidemics of emotional states were often induced by means of music.

The Hebrews had seers (נִצְּחִי) who were men of God and who were leaders of the people. Such men as Moses and Joshua come into that category. Very naturally they have miracles ascribed to them but there are no stories of ecstasy. It is quite possible that the experience with the Molten Calf (Exodus 32) has a hint of ecstasy and emotional epidemic. When the history comes up to Samuel and Saul there seems to have been a union between the seer (נִצְּחִי) and the prophet (נָבִי). I Samuel 9:9 says, "Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was before time called a Seer." This is obviously a late editorial addition in order to make clear the relationship of the two classes but, despite that fact, is quite definitely correct. The relationship of Samuel, David and Saul seems to have had ecstatic experiences mixed into it in some way or other (cf. I Samuel 19:20-24). It is very probable that in this story the emotionalism had gained epidemic proportions. There are so many varying strands of tradition woven around Samuel that it makes his own position in the matter difficult to clarify although one does prefer to think of him as the



last of the great seers and judges of Israel. It is quite apparent that Saul was overcome by the ecstasy of the prophets, probably by contagion, for people wondered how he came to be involved in the manifestations, (cf. I Samuel 10:1-16 and 11:1-11).

Prophetic guilds (אֲדָמָה, אֲדָמָה), which were in reality roving bands of ecstasies, were quite common in the time of Elijah, (I Kings 20:35). Elijah and Elisha had some connection with these bands but there is no evidence to show that they took part in the ecstatic performances. The fact that they worked alone and not with the group (II Kings 2:1-15), would indicate that they had no taste for the mass demonstrations. It is true that Elisha (II Kings 3:15) used music to induce a prophetic mood but there is no record of any trance or ecstasy. It is very probable that in Elijah and Elisha there is the definite attempt to break away from the excesses of ecstasy for it is true that prophecy became a much more practical and moral affair under their leadership. They may have used the prophetic guild and some of their more sane methods in order that the efforts of these men would not be wasted on sheer emotionalism but would be turned to religious and patriotic ends. Most definitely here is the point when the prophetic guild goes into a permanent decline from which it was never to return.





The men, under the guidance of Elijah and Elisha, settled down to agricultural pursuits and only at intervals felt the need of returning to their nomadic and emotional pursuits. (cf. II Kings 6:1-12).

The objection to ecstasy, whether in this day or in times past, is that there is no transference from emotion to ethics. The dervishes of the Old Testament were no paragons of morality nor were their ethics on a high plane. One does not have to search very diligently to find present day examples of great emotional revivalists who have erred very seriously in sexual morality and in matters of common honesty. Devotees of emotionalism very often develop double standards. That is seen in the Old Testament (II Kings 5:20ff) when the prophetic bands preyed upon the deep gratitude of Naaman the Syrian. Truth was a matter of little moment when the prophetic guild came into conflict with Micahiah (I Kings 22) who claimed only to speak the word of Yahweh but was neither a professional nor an ecstatic.

Accordingly the question is rightly asked as to whether an ecstatic could possibly make the clear ethical pronouncements and do the great charitable deeds that the great prophets did. There is no evidence in the Old Testament to show that the prophetic guilds ever did outstanding ethical acts. Elijah rebuked Ahab for his



persecution of Naboth (I Kings 21) and revealed an outstanding ethical sense. It is doubtful if he would have had the moral courage to do this if he had depended on an emotional state for his inspiration. The same statement applies to the fearless attitude of Micaiah referred to above. Elisha confronted Jehoshaphat (II Kings 3:11ff) very fearlessly and disclaimed any connection with the prophetic guild. This attitude, of psychological necessity, must have been based on something a lot more stable than a shifting emotionalism.

The issue seems to be as to whether a man can tie himself up to a thoroughgoing ethical and moral standard and still retain the need for an ecstatic experience. The conclusion seems to be that for the former attitude an individual needs all the resources and energy at his disposal without frittering them away in the excess of emotion. A religion of pure emotion has always been dangerous not only to personality but also to moral and ethical convictions.

George Adam Smith writes thus, (Expositor's Bible, Book of the Twelve Prophets, Vol. 1),

"Religious ecstasy is always dangerous to the moral and intellectual interests of religion. The largest prophetic figures of the period, though they feel ecstasy, attain their greatness by rising superior to it. Elijah's raptures are impressive; but nobler are his defence of Naboth and his denunciation of Ahab. And so Elisha's inducement of the





prophetic mood by music is the least attractive element in his career: his greatness lies in a combination of the care of souls with political insight and vigilance for national interests.

..... Ecstasy is so easily induced or intimated that much of it cannot be genuine..

..... at first the feeling might be sincere but then it so soon can become morbid and easily fall into sympathy with drunkenness and sexual passion which was part of the Canaanite practices."

H. W. Robinson (op. cit.) defends the ecstasy of prophets thus, "Such phenomena as these no more discredit the inner worth of prophetic ideas than the eccentricities of genius in other realms discredit its own high achievements."

The fact is, of course, that the prophets dealt in the realm of ethics and morals which are affected by emotionalism more than is the invention of the electric light by an eccentric genius. Psychologically the two types cannot be compared. The morality and the social adjustments of a genius may be on a low plane and that does not affect his work to any extent. When one deals with morals and ethics his own morals and ethics must be just as high, if not higher than those of the people he would lead, otherwise the result is cant and hypocrisy. A purely emotional religion stands in constant danger of losing its moral conviction.

This paper does not argue that the great prophets



were utterly devoid of emotion, but it does argue that, at its height, prophecy had no need of an artificial inducement of an ecstatic state. In a bare half century after Elijah came the prophet Amos with the prelude to the golden age of great prophecy in which, as yet, unrivalled social and ethical teachings were propounded. Such could not have occurred without a complete break with ecstasy and its vacillating moods. Amos makes his position very clear when he says, "I hate, I despise your feast days and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream." (Amos 5:21-24). He made a clear break with the ecstasies when Amaziah charged him with being a hireling and he replied, "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruits." (Amos 7:14)

When Hosea came, a few years after Amos, he was even more emphatic in disclaiming all association with the ecstasies when he said, "the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad." (Hosea 9:7)

From Amos onward there is no indication that the





prophets tried to induce ecstatic or prophetic moods by artificial methods. Hence there could be no ecstasy. There is no further evidence of prophetic bands making a professional practice of prophesying. The prophets now are individuals of various walks of life who have felt the call of God to speak to the people his word. The word of God is proclaimed, for the most part, in social and ethical terms.

Many questions may be raised concerning the above statement. Most of the literary prophets record their calls to proclaim the word of God. Does not the call of Isaiah (Chap. 6) and the call of Jeremiah (Chap. 1) indicate an ecstatic state? When the prophet says "Thus saith Yahweh", does he not mean that he has heard the voice of Yahweh speaking to him? The recurrent phrases, "Yahweh showed me", and "Yahweh spoke these things to me with the strength of hand", and others point to some extraordinary sort of experience, do they not? Jeremiah (20:9) speaks of the message being "a burning fire". The messages are given as a result of a vision or as the compulsion of an outer voice that spoke very clearly, which surely denotes an emotional state. What about the time when Isaiah went about "naked and barefoot for three years", (Is. 20:2) and when Jeremiah put a yoke around his neck (Jer. 27:2,3)? What does the prophet mean when he talks about a message being withheld,



(Hab. 2:1 and Jer. 42:7)? Does that not indicate an ecstatic state of some kind? Later on the message did "get through". Was the power of the trance more effective at the next attempt?

To answer these problems there are a few facts that must be used as a basis for judgment.

1. Taking into account the above statements it is not psychologically sound nor is it logical to assume that men with such lofty and clear ethical approaches to the practical problems of ethics and of society, as the great prophets had, would stoop to crudely emotional devices to obtain this inspiration. When men like Jeremiah and Isaiah spoke on issues of national politics they did so after having rationally thought through the problems and not after having subjected themselves to trances. This does not preclude emotion nor does it disregard the power of an emotional drive but it does assert that great prophecy is primarily a matter of rational reasoning and sound logic.

2. The psychology of the Old Testament records and the language of these records belong to an era that was pre-scientific. Hence the recorder's approach to his stories is made from an entirely different angle than that of the modern student and the language is of an age where exactness





was not considered essential. It is not reasonable to expect that the writers would use twentieth century terms to express ancient thoughts. Visions, miracles and voices were the thought forms of that age and their meaning was understood by the common man. Their thought modes were quite objective.

A modern parallel can be drawn with the preacher of this present time. The modern preacher, trained in literary criticism and in a scientific approach to the Bible, usually finds it necessary to speak to a congregation which is not the least informed as to such an approach. To speak in terms that the preacher would prefer would mean the alienation of a large part of his congregation. Accordingly, in the hope of gradually leading his congregation into a deeper view of the scriptures, the minister uses terms and vehicles of language, acceptable to the congregation, but filled with a new meaning. This does not mean that the preacher is false to his convictions or that he is currying favour with his congregation. It does mean that he is engaging in an educational process that may be slow but which will be ultimately effective without the excessive injuring of peoples' deep feelings.

The great prophets were in such the same situation.





They sought to lead the people from the old to the new and, for the most part, used the language of the old.

3. Despite the above it must also be recognized that the prophets themselves were not entirely emancipated from the old beliefs. Yahweh, for instance, was very real to them and they felt a personal relationship to him. They accepted the fact that Yahweh could speak to them and show them many things. In a philosophical sense he did exactly that. The reality of God was essentially the same in the days of the prophets as it is now. The prophets spoke of this in the practical way which was characteristic of the age. We surround the same experience with highly philosophical concepts.

4. The prophets had to get the ear of the people for the common person was no more interested in hearing what the prophet had to say than is the common person today. The modern preacher uses modern means to attract his congregation. He advertizes himself and his church and his sermon subjects by a variety of devices in order that people will listen to the essential message. The Ancient Prophet got the attention of the people by using devices that would appeal to the crowds of his day. "Thus saith Jahweh" was a cry that would make many people stop and



listen. Isaiah is reported to have walked naked and bare-foot for three years in an effort to get people's attention. The truth behind such a story cannot be discerned. Some scholars see this as an indication of ecstasy but, under no circumstances would a state of ecstasy last for that length of time. Jeremiah walked around with yokes about his neck which would certainly attract attention and illustrate the truth of his message. The prophet often appeared in some peculiar garb. One may question the ethics of such "publicity stunts" even as he questions the ethics of much that modern preachers do. However, to the prophet this was a means to a glorious end. The people had to be made listen before the word of Yahweh could be spoken.

5. In an effort to understand these men better it might be well to describe them as men with a religious complex. They were born of an intensely religious nation and were nurtured in devout homes. Their schools were the tabernacles and their teachers were the priests. From childhood they learned of the divine mission of the Children of Israel. Being more sensitive and possessing deeper emotions than most men, the prophets found their whole thoughts centered on their nation interpreted in a religious sense. Accordingly all their mental patterns



were associated into a definite system. This produced a complex. Complexes are built around many things -- politics, home, sex, hobbies, etc. No complex is more powerful than a religious one. The prophets built theirs around Yahweh.

A religious complex does not mean a rational gathering together of all ideas of Yahweh and an intellectual contemplation of them. It does mean that all thoughts, ideals, attitudes, aspirations and hopes, whether conscious or subconscious, find their expression in a deep loyalty to Yahweh. All the impressions of the external world, all the inherited mechanisms, and all the mental concepts flowing through an active mind would be gathered up in one mighty flow of energy towards the one desire to see the cause of Yahweh prosper. Such a complex limits greatly the modes of expression both physical and vocal and for the great prophets the mode was the life of religion. In other words the whole power of an intensely verile personality was concentrated on one subject with the result that all energies are turned in one direction. These energies pile up and become more and more compelling until they must be expressed in some manner. Then the release comes the energy tumbles out of the person in a great torrent.







The energy thus having been exhausted, the individual retires until compelled once more to find a mode of expression for his convictions.

The call of Isaiah (Chap. 6) tells about him sitting in the temple and seeing a vision. The sanctuary was a very meaningful place for the young man for he had been closely associated with it. He was greatly perplexed about the plight of Israel. The quietness of the House of Yahweh gave opportunity for contemplation and he wished that he could find some way to be of service to Yahweh and his fellow men yet he felt quite inadequate. Under the spell of this quite intense feeling there grew up the sense of the glory and holiness of Yahweh. His glory stood in great contrast to his own sense of inferiority and to the great need of the people. The energy of the religious complex surges into consciousness and he knows that Yahweh would give him the power and the people the opportunity to serve him. Isaiah is thereby convinced that he is chosen of God to be his prophet and so dedicates himself to the task. Later there arises the necessity of putting the experience into words. The only way that Isaiah could express this experience was in the form of the language that he knew. The result is the beautiful and meaningful account of his



vision.

Amos was a man from the country, deeply pious and with a keen sense of the personal presence of God. He was a man of great conviction. When he went to the city, as he would have to do in the course of his business, he was greatly upset by the inequalities and oppression that he saw. The open immorality of the leaders revolted his entire religious nature. Thus there started within his personality the workings of the religious complex. The energy was built up to such a degree that the inner compulsion to speak on behalf of Yahweh was irresistible. He, very probably, made his pronouncements and then retired to his home until the pressure of the religious complex compelled him to speak again. Because of his intense nature his words would be vivid and forceful. He would speak in terms of visions with great reality for that was the mode of expression to which he was accustomed. However, just because he said that Yahweh showed him a basket of fruit or because he said that he saw Yahweh standing upon the altar is no proof that he was an ecstatic.

The vivid words of Jeremiah (4:19-26) are sometimes a stumbling block to scholars. The reference to a "burning fire" (20:9) raises many questions. If there were definite evidences of ecstatic states in the life of Jeremiah



these might be classed as such. Since there is no concrete evidence of ecstasy then these incidents may be taken as indications of the intense emotion of a man who was very vitally concerned about the relationship between God and man and between man and man. Jeremiah would never have become the prophet he was if there had not been a burning fire within his heart and if he did not have the compelling conviction that the whole structure of human affairs was about to fall into chaos. The messages from Yahweh could very well have been delayed and cause him concern without the presence of ecstasy. The modern minister, with numerous activities during the week and two sermons on Sunday, well knows the feeling of a lack of inspiration. He knows, too, that the only way to recover his inspiration is to take the time and create the silence necessary for a reawakening of the spirit. There is no ecstasy there nor was there any in the experience of Jeremiah. Was there any indication at all that Jeremiah desired an ecstatic state and attempted to induce one there would be some basis for the argument that the above incidents were examples of ecstasy. Failing the establishment of that point it is reasonable to assume that the incidents reflect the vivid language of men moved to great insights by an all-consuming religious complex.







Ezekiel has not been discussed here because the priest was so mixed up with the prophet that it is difficult to decide to which group he belongs. Some of his great moral pronouncements will be discussed later, but these are outweighed by his priestly convictions. Even his greatest utterances are tied up to cult practices. It must be admitted that there are signs of ecstasy in his life. He once remained dumb for seven days and he lies in one position for a long time. He is transported from Babylon to Jerusalem "in the spirit" and has other trance-like experiences. (Ez. 3, 4, 8). An argument can easily be made for ecstasy in the experience of Ezekiel. At the same time, it must be admitted that when one reads the oracles of Ezekiel he is conscious of being in other company than that of the great prophets of Israel.



## TRIALS



## Chapter II

### DREAMS

The question as to the meaning of dreams has been the concern of man ever since the dawn of the power of thought. The one conviction that has run through all history is that dreams had some connection with the life of man and that if dreams could be interpreted correctly they would yield a clue as to man's future. Great emphasis has always been placed on the interpretation of dreams and in all ages men and women have posed as being dream interpreters. Throughout the tortuous history of dream interpretation there have been two main methods of deciphering the meanings:

1. The explanation of a dream as a unit by a qualified person trained in the code of dreams. The interpretations, of course, were purely arbitrary.

2. The explanation of the different figures in a dream as a symbol for something. Gradually the symbols became fixed and the interpretations crystallized. Hence now it is possible to obtain a "dream book" which will enable an individual to decipher his own dreams without reference to an expert.





Only a minority of people have been sceptical about dream interpretation. The majority of people have always had a suspicion that dreams had some significance.

No really scientific study of dreams was done until Sigmund Freud wrote his monumental work at the beginning of this century. He believed that dreams were very significant and that a dream was the way by which an individual fulfilled a wish that had either been repressed or frustrated. His theory was that when a dream was carefully examined the fundamental wish would be uncovered and the patient could adjust himself to a disturbing situation. Dreams came to play a large part in psychoanalysis. Freud favoured the symbolic method of interpretation.

Undoubtedly Freud went to extremes with his theories and most certainly over-emphasized the sexual nature of dreams. The fact was established, however, that dreams were the result of the activity of the mind when the individual was asleep. The action is greatly condensed but the pictures in a dream are essentially true. Ultimately dreams do show the condition of the mind which thrusts them forth. If a person is possessed of a complex, as it has been suggested the prophets were, his dreams will



very probably be centred on the subject of his complex even as his waking thoughts are grouped around it.

Dreams have causes. The following seems to be a good list:

1. Memory -- the dreamer's mind mulls over events of the immediate past or of the distant past and reproduces them in picture fashion.

2. External stimulation -- a sound, the temperature of the room, a movement, the pressure of bed clothes on body organs may start the mind working around certain symbols.

3. Internal stimulation -- the sympathetic nervous system often provokes the mind to action. A stomach ache easily causes a dream.

Dreams are often absurd and illogical. Events are compressed into such a short space of time that they tumble over each other. Quite often a dream is of a problem-solving nature and at other times it expresses the hopes, aspirations, ambitions and fears of the individual. To really interpret dreams one must know the dreamer, his personality and his ambitions. Dreams may reveal many



things to the dreamer regarding his repressed or frustrated wishes. They may be prophetic in the sense that the future will be determined by the actions of the dreamer.

The people of the Old Testament times were concerned about dreams. The stories of them have come down to us in varying forms. At the outset of this study it must be understood that the record of a dream as it is written in the Old Testament is not in the original form as the dreamer first related it, but has been subjected to constant revision and editing as they have been retold and rewritten. Dreams never do appear in such a clear, logical and concise manner as the dreams of Joseph are recorded (Genesis 37). As with all ancient writings these stories have been levelled down to a concrete folk tale form. It is the folk tale version and not the original version that we have in the Old Testament today.

The Hebrew word for dream is  $\text{חלום}$  which is derived from the root  $\text{חלם}$ . Freud would have been encouraged to know that this word originally had a sexual content and meant "to experience an emission of seminal fluid" or "to attain to puberty". The development was logical since the most vivid dreams do accompany such an experience. Further than this, however, it is not possible





to go for there is no evidence to show that the Hebrews retained the connotation.

The dreams in the Hexateuch are all in the prophetic document "E" and seem to replace the rather crude theophanies of the "J" document. In other words in "E" Yahweh has become more spiritualized and instead of coming personally to earth in order to communicate his messages, he now reveals them through the medium of a dream. It becomes quite clear (Numbers 12:6) that Yahweh intends only to make himself visible to Moses, who deserved such a distinction since he was the great hero of Hebrew history. The ordinary prophet had to content himself with dreams and visions.

To the Hebrew mind the dream (חלום) and the vision (חזון) were the same thing. The conclusion appears to be that in the Seventh Century B.C. dreams were considered as a valid way for Yahweh to reveal himself.

The dreams fall into three groups:

1. The supernatural type in which we do not know enough about the circumstances to know what actually took place. Thus the dream wherein Abimelech is prevented from having sexual intercourse with Sarah (Genesis 20:3) is a



problem. Sexual ethics certainly had not advanced to such a stage that Abimelech's guilty conscience would cause him to dream.

2. The problem-solving dream in which some question found its solution. Jacob (Gen. 31:10ff) had a dream which solved his problem as to how he could gain advantage over Laban. This decidedly could not have been a revelation from God but was rather the result of the machinations of a shrewd mind. The dream fits in very well with the character of Jacob and perhaps was the result of the activity of his mind even while he was asleep.

The dreams of the Egyptians which Joseph interpreted fall into the same category (Genesis 40 and 41). The minds of the butler, the baker and the Pharaoh were all concerned with their own particular problem and the dreams were a result of their preoccupation. Famine, for instance, was a constant threat to the Egyptian government and the Pharaoh must have been deeply concerned. After making allowances for the inevitable changes in the process of transmission, the stories are probably based on fact. Joseph was intelligent, shrewd and acquainted with the intrigues of the court. He also knew the precarious state of the food supply. Being eager to take advantage of every



opportunity he could have posed as a dream interpreter very easily and could have interpreted the dreams acceptably.

3. The wish dream in which desires, ambitions and frustrations are revealed. Into this class fall the dreams of Joseph concerning his brothers (Genesis 37). Joseph was a precocious youth and was frustrated because he was the youngest. The love of his father compensated to a degree especially when he received the coat of many colours. This satisfaction only urged him on to desires of dominance. His dreams and their consequent interpretation were a natural result of his all-consuming ambition.

The dreams of Solomon (I Kings 3:15) are of the same type. The dream concerning wisdom was very natural when one considers the character of Solomon. Joseph and Solomon had many qualities in common.

In the Book of Judges (7:13 and 15) dreams are regarded as quite valuable. King Saul (I Samuel 28:6 and 15) felt that Yahweh was neglecting him when he experienced no dreams. In fact he tried other methods to get a message from Yahweh after the dream method failed.

Although the "P" document does place an emphasis on dreams the "D" document, which followed within the next





century, expressed the hope that a check would be kept on dreams for they were not always profitable to the religion of Yahweh (Leut. 18:1-5). The standard by which the validity of a dream was to be judged was as to whether or not it agreed with the known instructions of Yahweh.

This cautious attitude toward dreams grew quite rapidly and by the time of the great literary prophets they had become quite discredited. Jeremiah (23:27-32) is very emphatic in his denunciation of them. He insisted that false prophets used dreams to get their messages (29:8). The statement "dreamers are but deceivers" comes as late as the Babylonian Era (Zech. 10:2) and indicates a prejudice against dreams. The reference in Joel (2:28) concerning old men dreaming has no particular reference to prophecy but rather to the apocalyptic thought of the time.

The drama of Job has several references to dreams and visions. It is very natural that a man in the physical condition of Job should have his sleep disturbed by dreams and visions (7:14). The "Elihu Section" which is not really a part of the drama speaks very clearly of dreams and visions as being a means of revelation. Yet the writer of Ecclesiastes (5:3 and 7), which was written about the same time, distrusts dreams. After the great prophets



dreams did gain popularity in some sections.

The Book of Daniel which was written in the Second Century B.C., has some quite extensive references to dreams in the first six chapters. The book is not prophetic but apocalyptic. It is doubtful whether the dreams are historic. The author uses this device to enhance the effect of his story. Yet it is an indication that some of the people in the Second Century B.C. believed in dreams even as do some people today.

There is no specific and single theory of dreams in the Old Testament even as we find no agreement today on the subject. One outstanding fact is that although early prophecy may have placed reliance upon dreams, the great canonical prophets had nothing to do with them.



## WISDOMFUL THINKING





## Chapter III

### WISHPFUL THINKING

Unless a mind is very well trained and excellently disciplined the deep desires and wishes of the individual may become to him as convincing as matters of actual fact. Any given incident may be very easily interpreted in terms of the individual's own particular complex. In other words a person's thoughts may be very readily based on his wishes rather than on actual fact.

When pushed to its logical extreme, wish projection into thought becomes injurious to personality and results in phantasies and delusions which are characteristic of the insane. The insane person builds his whole world out of his own wishes and desires which are, for him, reality. Delusions of grandeur, whereby the patient considers himself Napoleon, are a result of the projection of wishes until the wish becomes more of a reality than actual fact.

Modern education with its scientific viewpoint and its great emphasis on objective thinking, has done much to lessen the amount of wishful thinking done by men and women. The advent of the experimental methods in all realms of thought has caused people to become very sensitive



to the difference between straight thinking and wishful thinking. The advent of introspection in the realms of psychology has caused people to examine their own wishes and desires and to see how far they layings upon their thoughts.

Accordingly the trained mind is able today to ascertain what convictions and attitudes are a result of wish projection and what ones have their basis in actual fact. Despite the recent advances the world is by no means rid of wishful thinking for the human mind seems to persist in twisting and turning fact so that the personality will not be unduly wounded by the inevitable disappointments and failures in life. The complex around which a life is built will determine, in a large measure, the colour that is given to a person's wishes and hence will determine the type of thought he has.

If wish projection and wishful thinking is a problem to the Modern age it must have been a much greater problem in the past ages when minds were untrained and uncritical. The world of fact and the world of wishes were so entwined in the thought of the people that there was hardly any distinction between the two.

To a nation such as the Hebrews, whose wishes were



for national supremacy and whose history had taught them that they were the chosen people of Yahweh, the line between wish and fact was very faint. When men spoke with the authority of Yahweh it was very difficult to decide whether the message really was from Yahweh or whether it was a wish projection on the part of the speaker. The Man of God was also a citizen of Israel.

Ample evidence is available to show that the message was very often the result of the wishes of the one who spoke. In the section on ecstasy it has already been noted that the prophetic guilds were not always accurate in their prophecies but were swayed to a considerable extent by the public sentiment of the time. Thus prophetic guild desired to keep in favour with the king. It was comparatively easy for the prophets to find that the message of Yahweh agreed with the king's desires. (cf. I Kings 22). Many prophets in Israel were superficial optimists who painted a glowing picture of the future of Israel despite the conditions of the times. They insisted that what they predicted was what Yahweh had showed them. In reality what they said was what the people wanted to hear and what they themselves wished would happen. It would not be fair to say that all these men were dishonest for some were





quite sincere. Their minds were not keen nor critical enough to make a clear distinction between fact and desire.

It is a healthy sign when a person realizes that there is a difference between clear thinking and wishful thinking for then he begins to turn a critical eye on his own thoughts. The result is a keen, discerning and analytical mind. The prophets of Israel made a big step forward when some of them saw the difficulty with early prophecy and spoke out definitely against it. The great prophets were men of this type. Jeremiah (Chap. 23) was well aware of the pitfalls of wishful thinking and raises his voice against it. He calls such prophecy (v. 16) "visions of their own heart" and asserts that it certainly is not the word of Yahweh.

Jeremiah was, at times, an optimist regarding the future of Israel, but he was a realist as well. Never did he insist that the way to Israel's ultimate triumph was easy. He insisted that the anger of Yahweh could not be appeased with fine words but only with repentant hearts. The pathway of the repentant heart was one of great trial and tribulation.

The great blow against wishful thinking in prophecy



was struck by Jeremiah when asserted (Chap. 28) that the true test of prophecy was to wait and see what happened. If Yahweh had really spoken, the prophecy was only the wishful imaginings of the prophet's own heart there would be no fulfillment.

During the seige of Jerusalem Jeremiah was quite realistic in his pronouncements. Undoubtedly he, as did others, sincerely wished that Jerusalem would be saved and the people left unharmed but he saw that mere wishes would not accomplish his desire. Very realistically he spoke of the doom that was in store for the nation as a result of her wickedness (Chaps. 12 and 13). The people were told not to mourn for the dead king (Chap. 22:10f) and the new king is assured that he will never return from exile. Salvation will come, not because the people wish for it, but only because the exiled leaders prepare themselves morally and spiritually for the future (Chap. 29). Thus did this prophet attempt to force the people to face the hard facts of life, to realize that their folly and sin had caused their present state and to place upon their shoulders the responsibility of redeeming themselves. This cold logic and straight thinking was tempered with a warm optimism for the prophet really believed that the people, having been awakened



would measure up to the demands of Yahweh.

In contrast to the realism of Jeremiah stands the superficiality and the wishful thinking of the prophets such as Hananiah. Entirely overlooking the logic of the situation and the self-evident facts, these prophets asserted that Jerusalem could never fall. They had no basis for such a statement except their own desires and wishes. Jerusalem did fall and the message of these prophets then was that it would only be a short time until Yahweh would restore his city. The only reason for such a statement was that they could not conceive of anything else.

In the conflict between Jeremiah and the other prophets there is a clear issue between wishful thinking and straight thinking. One could draw other parallels from the stories of the prophets. It is reasonable to assume that the great prophets were more sensitive to the pitfalls of wishful thinking than were the lesser prophets.

It would not be correct to leave the impression that the great prophets never did wander from the narrow pathway of straight thinking. Their very humanity made this impossible. One outstanding problem is the curses of Jeremiah. How do they fit in with the logical aspects of







the prophet's thought and personality? There is record that Jeremiah uttered some of the most devastating curses against people who crossed him in any way. The men of Anathoth (11:18-23) plotted against his life and he struck back at them with a most scathing curse. The underlying cause for such an outburst was personal resentment and anger. The wish that such a thing should happen prompted the curses. Several curses of this type illustrate the same trait in Jeremiah's character. The curse on Pashur (Chap. 20) was a result of the prophet being put in the stocks and the one on Ahab and Zedekiah (29:21) was prompted by a resentment against anyone who would dare to take exception to his statements. The curses on Jehoiakim (22:18ff and 36:30ff) were prophecies of a violent death for the king. Despite the curses Jehoiakim died a normal death for in the Book of Kings (II Kings 24:6) is the historical statement of a peaceful death. In this instance Jeremiah failed in the test of true prophecy which he himself had set (cf. Chap. 28) for he had declared that if a prophecy were not fulfilled then the prophet did not have a message from Yahweh. The conclusion is that under the stress of emotion even a prophet like Jeremiah allowed his feelings to dictate the words that he uttered. Hence the curses were not of Yahweh but of the wishes of his own



heart.

If Jeremiah had known himself a little better he might have avoided this type of pitfall. At the same time this weakness does not depreciate the value of the prophet's work. The exuberance of feeling that caused these curses was part of the personality that made him so great a prophet.

There are some curses recorded in the Book of Ezekiel. This prophet devotes nearly three chapters to a most detailed account of the destruction of Tyre (26:1 - 29:16). The statements are most scathing and sarcastic. Yet he lived to realize that his prophecy did not come true (29:11-20). Egypt also falls under the bitterness of Ezekiel's pen (29:17-20) in a very literary curse. He wished that such a fate would befall these places and the wish was a prelude to the prophecy. Thus Ezekiel falls into the same error as did Jeremiah.

A difference is easily noted between the two. The curses of Jeremiah come with the rush of hot and hasty words, spoken on the spur of the moment. The curses of Ezekiel are cool, calculated and well prepared. Jeremiah might be excused for this because they are a result of his



over-enthusiasm. Ezekiel gave time and thought to the composition of his curses and thus fell more deeply into the error of wishful thinking. It might be more accurate to say that Jeremiah was the victim of passionate thinking whereas Ezekiel was the victim of cold wishful thinking.

The prophets were human. They were subject to the same prejudices, faults and hasty words that are the lot of any human being. At times they must have given way to their wishes and so expressed them. Such is not surprising. The remarkable thing is that, being open to such error, there is so little trace of it in their greatest prophecies.





## SOURCES OF INTELLECTUAL INSPIRATION



## Chapter IV

### THE SOURCES OF PROPHETIC INSPIRATION

Thus far an attempt has been made to suggest that, in great prophecy, abnormal psychological phenomena were reduced to a minimum. Ecstasy, dreams, visions and wishful thinking have been considered and very few traces of these things have been found among the literary prophets. Perfect psychological adjustment and integration has not been claimed for these men. It has been acknowledged that they were human and faulty to the same extent as other men. At the same time it has been suggested that they were men in advance of their time and men who had thought more deeply than the average individual.

To explain the great energy and conviction of the prophets the term "religious complex" has been proposed. It would seem that around the focal point of religious conviction the abilities and the energies of the prophets revolved. Such a description of their personalities explains many of the apparently abnormal things about them.

After all this has been said there is still left an indefiniteness about the description of their personality



One is inclined to ask the question as to whether something more positive could be said. What are the sources of their inspiration?

Something of the same problem presented itself to Professor Overstreet in his book, "About Ourselves" and he added a postscript wherein he undertook to get away from the negative elements in personality and to talk about the positive elements. To approach this problem he looked at the great souls of history to attempt to understand what made them great. His conclusion is that men like Jesus and Socrates were great because they were expansive personalities and because they pushed the borders of their living beyond themselves to touch the lives of other people. In the case of Jesus he suggests that his expansiveness reached in other directions too. "He could not help being one, even with the Universe, for the outward sweep of his feeling carried him into union with that vital oneness he called God." Thus Jesus had two sources of inspiration, one was as his life touched his fellow men and the other was as his life touched the life of God.

The professor adds this very striking definition of greatness, "The great individuals have been great because





in one way or another, they have pushed beyond the ordinary limits of ego ..... If we looked for the peculiar element of expansiveness in each of our heroes we should, I think, bring heroes far nearer ordinary life so that they might serve more effectively as indications in the large of what normal life could be."

It would appear that Professor Overstreet has analyzed very well the personality of the great prophets and has suggested the sources of their inspiration. They were men of expansive personality who pushed back the boundaries of their living to touch the life of God and the lives of their fellow men. From this double contact with ultimate reality they derived their great inspiration.

That the prophets expanded the borders of their living to touch the life of God is apparent to those who read their messages. So much did their lives touch God's that they received a profound insight into the nature of God. Under their leadership Yahweh developed from a tribal deity who resided on Mount Sinai to a national God who had authority wherever his people might settle. From thence Yahweh gave promise of becoming the Universal God as conceived in the highest insight of Deutero-Isaiah. The narrow ritualism of their day became quite obnoxious to



them for their larger view of God demanded that he be given moral action rather than burnt offerings.

This constantly expanding view of the nature of Yahweh became the great motivation of their lives. They now were charged with the responsibility of leading the people into a larger view of true religion. They became acutely aware that Yahweh had called them to this task and that they were His messengers to the people. In a very real sense their prophecies came from the presence of God. So without equivocation they could definitely say to the people, "Thus saith Yahweh".

In times before, as has been suggested previously, such a formula was accompanied by fits of ecstasy and irrational states. Under the great prophets these phenomena disappeared and the words were used to indicate a vital relationship with God.

Social psychology has a term "folkways" which it uses to describe the habits, customs and traditions of any given group of people. A person reared in such a group becomes a sharer in the folkways. There is a way to speak, a way to worship and a way of performing almost every common act of living. To violate a folkway is to bring upon



one the censure of the group which often amounts to ostracism. This is particularly so when religious folkways are present. These change slowly and, often, at great cost.

The prophets encountered the folkways of their day and outgrew them. Yet their vehicles of expression were still the thought forms of the folkway. Thus they used old formulae with new meaning. The people did not always catch the new meaning but, nonetheless, it was there.

For instance Isaiah wrote his call according to the "folkway" of the time but that does not mean that he was an ecstatic or that he held the same conception of Yahweh as did the ordinary person of the day. What it does reveal is that Isaiah was deeply conscious of the reality of God and that he understood the moral nature of that reality. A long period of great prosperity in the Eighth Century B.C. had brought a general lowering of moral and economic standards against which Isaiah felt called upon to object in the name of Yahweh. He saw very clearly that Judah could not stand against the reality of invasion in her weakened moral condition and with her corrupt government. The people thought that they could appease Yahweh by offering to him sacrifices and burnt offerings and by celebrating their





griat national feast but the prophet knew differently. Yahweh demanded purity of heart and motive.

These thoughts had to have a focal point about which to concentrate themselves before the prophet could be organized for action. The crisis or the time of integration came one day when Isaiah sat in the temple contemplating the holiness and the moral qualities of Yahweh. He himself felt his own guilt and had to experience a release before he considered himself fit for his task. When the release came he was ready to act.

The experience of Isaiah is described (Isaiah 6) according to the folkway of the day and with telling effectiveness. The spirit of his experience certainly could not be imprisoned by any of the thought forms of the day.

The prophets were very conscious of the presence of Yahweh in their lives and felt that he was directing their actions. In Professor Overstreet's terminology they pushed back the boundaries of their own ego and touched the divine life of the Universe. The boundaries of their egos were pushed back in another direction, too, for they brought their understanding of Yahweh to bear upon the practical politics of the day. The prophets were not only men of



God but they were statesmen as well. Accordingly the second source of their inspiration was derived from a deep consciousness of the needs of mankind as individuals and as a nation. Thus there was built up in the prophets a moral judgment that was unique amongst the Children of Israel. It is, of course, difficult to tell where the moral demand of Yahweh ceased and the crying social needs of the people began for the two are complementary. Both are a tremendous source of inspiration.

The prophets were not always correct in their prophecies, and that is of little moment, but they were always correct when they spoke of the moral demands of Yahweh. Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Deutero-Isaiah all foretold the return of the Children of Israel from exile. They rise to lyrical heights when they describe the peace, prosperity and happiness that will attend the return. Yahweh is to direct the return and it will be good for the people. The actual history of the return is far from peaceful and comfortable. The records found in Ezra-Nehemiah give ample evidence of confusion and suffering. Herein were the prophets at fault. This optimistic note was not the heart of the message about the return, however. The keynote of the message was that the people must mend their ways and obey the moral dictates of Yahweh so that he might be able to



carry out his plans for Israel.

The moral and spiritual poverty of the message of the defeated and frustrated Ezekiel is clear to the careful reader of his oracles. Yet even this prophet rises to unexpected heights of moral admonition when he writes (36:22f.), "I will give you a new nature and I will put a new spirit in you, I will take away your hard nature and give you a nature that can be touched, I will put my own spirit within you, I will make you live by my laws, and you shall obey and observe my orders."

The insight of Deutero-Isaiah inspires him to predict erroneously that happy days are ahead for those who returned from exile. The eternal truth of his message, however, is intensely moral when he reviews the causes for Israel's troubles (50:1), "What writ of divorce did I ever hand to your mother? Whenever did I part with you or sell you to some creditor? 'Twas for your evil doings that you were sold, 'twas for your sins that your mother was divorced." (50:1).

There is a human element in all prophecy and because of that differences in the approach to problems is understandable. The important point lies not in the fact that





there were differences in the predictions as to the way things would happen, but in the fact that the prophets were in complete accord when speaking of moral issues. Ezekiel (Chaps. 38 and 39) sees Gog and Magog arraying all their armies against the Children of Israel and forecasts a tremendous battle that is to ensue. Gog and Magog will be defeated utterly and the arms that the hosts will leave behind will be sufficient for firewood for years to come. The victory is given to Israel by Yahweh for one purpose and that is to show the power and the influence of the true God. Because of the great victory people will be induced to turn from their evil ways and follow an all-powerful God.

Quite different is the picture that Deutero-Isaiah paints. His lofty conception touches the peak of prophetic insight in the Old Testament. There is no great victory predicted for Israel but all that he has to promise is a series of indignities and wrongs and sufferings. These the nation will endure so that, by her suffering, she may become the redemptive agent of Yahweh in the world. Her great reward will be in knowing that she has served God in a most effective manner. The great Suffering Servant passages (Isaiah 52:13 to the end of Chapter 53) gives a very heart-searching description of what is to come.



It should be noted that the purpose of the great victory and the purpose of the great suffering are identical, namely, to lead the people to Yahweh. The prophets tread different roads. Each walks in the way that his spiritual insight and knowledge of God leads him. Such is to be expected. The important point is that they both arrive at the same conclusion.

Such the same thing occurs in the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah in connection with the fate of Jerusalem. Isaiah (33:20) asserts that Jerusalem will not be disturbed and will live in peace, "a tent whose pegs are never pulled up, whose ropes are never rent." Micah has a different idea for he proclaims the destruction of Jerusalem. He says (3:12), "Sion shall be a plowed field, Jerusalem shall be a heap of ruins, the temple hill a mere wooded height."

Such a difference is negligible in the ultimate analysis. What is important is that their conception of true religion as being a moral demand of Yahweh does not differ. Thus the words of Isaiah (1:11f.) find confirmation in the perfect definition of religion given by Micah (6:8), "What does Yahweh ask from you but to be just and kind, and to live in quiet fellowship with your God."



Another indication that the inspiration of the prophets came from the expanding of their lives to touch the common life of the world is seen in the experience of Hosea. Out of the conflict in his personality between love and justice comes one of the greatest moral conceptions of God known to man. His sense of justice demanded that his unfaithful wife be left to suffer the slavery of prostitution since she had deliberately chosen that way. His deep love for his wife urged him to bring her back into his home. Out of that conflict came the idea of redemptive love. He would bring his wife back and establish her in her accustomed place but she first of all must go through a period of purification and repentance. If man did this would not Yahweh do infinitely more for his erring people? "Come let us return unto Yahweh; for he hath torn and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." (6:1).

Reference has already been made in this section to Isaiah and to the way in which he found the integration of his ideas by centering them in a moral God. It may be well to couple with that the impetus that was given to his career by his contact with the practical affairs of the time. His first demand was for the reformation of the





social and moral life of the day so that the abuses of the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah might be abolished. Then he hailed the threatened invasion by the Assyrian hosts as a warning from Yahweh, but with great sagacity counselled King Ahaz not to surrender to Assyria. He was confident that Yahweh would look after his own. Ahaz would not listen and became a vassal of Assyria. Some twenty-five years later Isaiah felt called upon to support Assyria and demand that the nation remain true to her allegiances and not to revolt because Egypt appeared to have the present advantage. A nation should honour her agreements, said the moral stalwart. Again his words were not heeded and the prophet foretells great doom for his country because of her faithlessness. Later, when Assyria advanced again, he once more bade the country remain steadfast and resist for he had faith that Yahweh would still protect his own. Sennacherib suddenly withdrew and Jerusalem was spared.

There is no greater statesman in Hebrew history than Isaiah. If his clear, moral insights had been followed the people would have been saved a lot of suffering. It was his clear sense of justice combined with his intense religious faith that inspired him to speak. Of course he was unpopular but he made a lasting impression upon his



age.

Jeremiah, who ranks first among the prophets in the matter of personal religion, was not only a man of God but he was also a statesman with great political wisdom. This prophet lived in times of changing nations and empires. Assyria and Egypt were in the throes of death as world powers and the star of Babylon was rising rapidly. Palestine was the buffer state that felt the impact of all these changes. Taking his cue from his personal knowledge of God and from a great understanding of the life of man, Jeremiah saw that his land could not possibly stand unless the people cooperated with Yahweh to build a nation after his law. Accordingly the prophet struck out in a vigorous attack against oppression, trickery, injustice, untruth and covetousness. No one was spared and in his condemnation he included the prophets who did not really speak the word of Yahweh (6:13-17).

Jeremiah considered himself a man of destiny (1:5) by the decree of Yahweh who had selected him even before he was born. God and the prophet were arrayed against a hostile world (1:3, 18, 19). He was a very sensitive personality but so great were the demands of Yahweh that he overcame his retiring disposition and spoke out boldly



This conviction of Yahweh's insistence on his service gave Jeremiah a sense of deep personal relationship with the divine. In a way it was also a matter of compensation and reaction against the priestly class for, although of a priestly family in Anathoth, he was not of the temple priesthood. This barred him on the one hand from social equality with the temple priests and on the other hand from free association with the laity. All over-compensation drove him from his limited sphere of activity into a wider sphere and into a bitter condemnation of the society that caused his situation.

The point of release for Jeremiah came when the Scythian hordes swept towards Palestine. It was the hand of Yahweh. The prophetic message was "repent or perish", and he declared that the Scythians were agents of Yahweh so that a reformation might be effected. A set back came when the threat of the barbarians failed to materialize. The shock of the failure of his prophecy to work was offset by his conviction that Yahweh had just delayed punishment for a while. He then asked for repentance while yet there was time.

The reforms of Josiah in 621 B.C. must have found favour with Jeremiah for he constantly pleaded for a unity





of purpose between Yahweh and the people (7:22-24). The years that followed the death of Josiah were unhappy and disturbed especially when the nation began to court the favour of Egypt. When Babylon became a threat, Jeremiah again saw the hand of Yahweh working out punishment to his erring children. He laboured to keep the nation faithful to her allegiance to Babylon and when the siege of Jerusalem began he despaired for the future.

Then came the first deportation and the vacillations of Zedekiah who was always attempting to curry the favour of the nation which seemed to be in the ascendancy. He kept a close watch on Egypt and her possibilities. At such treachery Jeremiah became very indignant and assured the people that Yahweh had no use for dishonesty and intriguing. The favour of Yahweh could only be received if the nation was upright and moral. Even though these events called forth his greatest preaching (35:1-9 and 29:1-23) yet the prophet was unable to stem the tide of revolt. The result was that Jerusalem was destroyed.

Jeremiah must have suffered greatly both spiritually and physically as his every move was frustrated. For more than forty years he had spoken out of a deep devotion to his God on the one hand and out of a comprehensive view of



human affairs on the other. His faith in God and his faith in the ultimate redemption of man was still the source of his greatest hope. Even to his last breath he was confident that Yahweh would be vindicated and that man would return again to his senses. His final message from Yahweh was his greatest wish for his fellow men, "After those days," saith Yahweh, "I will put my law in their inward parts and in their hearts. I will write it, and I will be their God and they shall be my people." (31:31-33).

Prophecy at its greatest, then, had two great concerns. The first was for the welfare of the word of Yahweh as the God of the Children of Israel who demanded not ritual adoration but moral action. The second was for the welfare of the nation of Israel that she would obey the laws of God and thus prosper. Out of these two concerns grew their great inspiration.

Last the impression be left that the prophets can be explained entirely from these two sources it must be stated that there is one more source of inspiration that does not permit of investigation. That is what might be called the supra-national source. In other words after all has been written there yet remain elements that can not be explained or even described. By the great prophets were grouped at



one particular stage in the history of the world still eludes a definite explanation. No more than the appearance of a Shakespeare, or a Beethoven or a Michael can be fully explained can the appearance of the prophets. That, however, passes out of the present field into the area of philosophy and theology.

Infallibility was not a part of the prophetic life whether the prophet's inspiration was great or whether it was small. It has been recognized that these men were possessed of human nature and therefore partook of its follies and failures. Even in prophetic mood they were not untrembled by their earthly moorings. Some prophets were ordinary and some were great. The great prophets stood at the parting of religious ways. One of these ways led to a national religion which interpreted history as a medium through which the divine revealed itself for the purpose of exalting a chosen people. The other way led to a religion that was personal, practical and universal. In this type of religion the divine was conceived as entering into history to establish a relationship with the soul of man thus giving to man a deep concern for God and for his fellow men. The inspiration of the prophets led them to point towards the second way, some were very definite about it and others groped in that direction. The people





were loath to follow the direction of prophetic inspiration for its demands were too great. They chose rather to turn away from the prophetic message and to follow the way of narrow nationalism which found its logical conclusion in a sterile Judaism. No great prophet appeared in Israel after the fifth century B.C.

Was the inspiration of the great prophets too weak that it did not prepare the way for its perpetuation? Some centuries later two men appeared -- John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. Their inspiration was, at least in part, a continuation of the prophetic line. The attempt to understand and explain these two characters would be far more complex had we not the great prophets as a background. These men perpetuated and enhanced true prophetic inspiration. Jesus of Nazareth raised it to such a height that a new religion appeared in the world.

The Christian Church is supposedly the inheritor of the prophetic tradition and inspiration, yet it is eternally in danger of wandering into a sterile ritualism and of forgetting the weightier matters of ethics and social action combined with a personal knowledge of God. True prophetic inspiration, however, is always in a



position or potential power. For God constantly inspires man, and the needs of man eternally inspire the sensitive souls and to this is forever added that plus which makes the future unpredictable.



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